It's Gotta Be You by BigBadLittleRed

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Summary:

An accumulation of one-shots in which Jonathan and Steve interact, fall in love, and do many other wondrous things together.

1. Sex Ed with Professor Harrington

Author's Note:

> (This will be a combination of requests I receive on Tumblr along with some of my own ideas perhaps. Feel free to send me an idea for a new chapter, I'm strangerthanjonathan on Tumblr!)

Summary for the Chapter:

> (From an anonymous user on Tumblr, who asked for : Inspired by an episode of freaks and geeks. Jonathan is called out by the health teacher and humiliated in class for not really knowing much about sex. After class, Steve finds him under the bleachers and decides to give him a lesson and answer all of Jon's embarrassing questions (not in a pervy or sexy way just honest and funny the way the coach did for Sam in the episode of F&G) I just want them to have a sweet bonding moment.)

His mom always said that school came before anything else, but honestly he couldn't quite stick to that motto when his late night shifts depended on them keeping hot water. Sometimes it feels like he's barely keeping his head above water, skimming passing grades and working long hours while attending school. He'd never get into NYU anyway, let alone be able to pay for it.

"Byers." He jerks awake, having been dozing quietly in health class with his cheek tucked against his hand. The other boys around him start to snicker quietly as he adjusts in his seat, Coach Amarillo glares at him from the front of the class. He's standing in front of a crude diagram of what seems to be something that he can't quite identify, some portion of the human body he's sure.

"Sorry, sir." He mutters, blinking heavy and exhausted eyes and running a hand through his hair with a soft sigh.

"If you think you're so well educated in this class that you can sleep through it, why don't you come up here?" The older man insists, Jonathan feels his face heating up as he shakes his head, the class whispering and laughing under their breath. "It wasn't a question, Byers." The man snaps, and Jonathan slowly pulls himself from his seat and shuffles up to the board.

"Okay," He mumbles, fidgeting his hands together and gazing warily at the diagram.

"Now, do me a favor and tell me about the ovaries." The man says, points at the diagram vaguely and leans back against his desk.

"O-Oh..." He turns his head and stares at the picture blankly, wracks his brain and tries to think of anything he might have ever heard of about ovaries. Ovarian cancer is a thing, he thinks, but that told him nothing about where they might be.

"Point out an ovary, Byers." The man urges, and Jonathan's hands twitch together for a moment before he points up at something. "Not even close, kid." The man snorts, the kids begin to laugh a little louder, Jonathan ducks his head in embarrassment. "Could you tell me about what a prostate is?" He inquires, and Jonathan turns to his teacher and slowly shakes his head.

"No sir," He replies quietly, the man rolls his eyes and runs a hand over his short-cropped hair.

"Tell me this then, Byers. Is a prostate in a man's body or a woman's?" He asks, and Jonathan's eyes widen, he shifts his weight and frowns down at the floor. Prostate, he'd never heard of that before, so it couldn't be something he had most likely, right?

"A woman's, coach?" He says warily, and the man sighs.

"Sit down genius, and try to pay attention." He waves a hand, Jonathan quickly retreats to his desk. The boys are grinning at each other, smiling and whispering.

"Creepy and a virgin, a double threat." He hears a boy near the back hiss, the other boys around him stifling their laughter badly.

"Quiet down back there!" The coach demands, and they settle down.

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Jonathan gets to school the next day and finds the word ***VIRGIN*** scrawled across his locker in black marker. He sighs and drops his head against the metal panel, exhausted in far too many ways to count. He opens his locker and grabs his things, slamming it shut once more and storming down the hall.

During lunch he retreats to the bleachers, where he can be by

himself and avoid any more scrutiny from his classmates. He sits and mopes, more than usual at least, as he sorts through some of his newly developed pictures. He finds one of Steve and Nancy on the hood of Steve's car, the both of them laughing and smiling while waving in the direction of the camera.

He sighs quietly, runs fingers through his long bangs and has the urge to just go home and lay in his bed. He was seventeen years old, eighteen next February, it was embarrassing being one of the only kids in school to know nothing about anything when it came to stuff like this.

"Hey, Byers." He startles, finding Steve carefully crouching under the edge of the bleachers and making his way over to where Jonathan is seated.

"You here to make fun of me too?" He mutters bitterly, Steve chuckles quietly and sinks down next to him.

"Not everyone knows what they're talking about when it comes to stuff like that. Hell, I didn't know much about girls until I was about sixteen." He offers, and when Jonathan gives him a look he holds up his hands in a peaceful gesture. "I'm just saying, not everyone gets very involved in stuff like that in high school." He explains.

"I never even got, you know... The *talk*." Jonathan cringes, and Steve grins before laughing in amusement. "What if Will asks me something? I'm gonna look like an idiot." He grumbles, leaning into Steve's side when the older boy wraps an arm around his shoulders. They were friends, a strange pair, but Jonathan knew that Steve liked him in one way or another.

"Well, what do you want to know?" Steve inquires, and Jonathan feels his face begin to heat up as he ducks his head. Steve was offering to talk to him about sex, was that normal?

"Uh well..." He frowns down at his clasped hands, trying to think about where he might be able to start. "What was... like... your first time like?" He keeps his eyes firmly on his hands, clenched so tight together the skin was beginning to tint white.

"Jeez, I dunno. Let's see, that would be Stacey Edwards in tenth grade." He admits, and Jonathan thinks about Stacey. An older girl, well for Jonathan, but not for Steve. She was pretty, even back in tenth grade, a little bashful but sweet. "Most awkward experience of my life." He snorts, and Jonathan turns his head in surprise.

"R-Really?" He asks quietly, and Steve nods his head with a grin.

"Oh yeah, first time is always the worst. Nobody knows where to put their hands, it's all sweaty, you're trying to prioritize between kissing and taking off clothes. God forbid you try to take off her bra, I fumbled with the clasp for like five minutes and she ended up doing it anyway." He confesses, seeming a little embarrassed at the memory, but still amused.

"Have you ever..." Jonathan's heart is racing, he wants so badly to ask but at the same time he doesn't want to ruin everything.

"Ever...?" Steve urges him forward with a small frown, pulling his

arm off Jonathan's shoulders and resting his elbows on his thighs.

"What do you know about gay sex?" Jonathan blurts, catching sight of Steve's wide eyes before he forces his own shut and sighs angrily at himself. Everyone already called him a queer, now everyone would know he really was one.

"Um... Nothing really." Steve says quietly, and Jonathan is surprised that he hasn't just gotten up and walked off. The younger focuses on the grass near their feet and tries to keep his breathing steady, nervous about how this might affect their friendship. "Jonny," He murmurs, fingers brushing Jonathan's arm before pulling away. "Are you gay?" He whispers, and Jonathan shakes his head.

"No, of course not!" He immediately replies, even though his brain is screaming at him to just admit it already. He'd never told anyone, but he'd always sort of known. He wasn't gay though, because he thought a lot of girls were so damn gorgeous. It was just that there were some really nice-looking guys too...

"It's okay if you are, man. I mean..." Steve shrugs awkwardly, and Jonathan shakes his head.

"Just forget it, tell me the basics." He insists, and Steve stares at him warily for a moment before nodding slowly.

"Okay, yeah, of course." He agrees quietly, rubbing his hands together. "Well foreplay is important," He offers, and when Jonathan gives him a puzzled look, he sighs. "This is going to take a while." He mutters, wiping a hand over his face.

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They spend an entire two hours talking about sex, eventually some of the awkward tension eases away and they're talking and laughing. They end up on the grass under the bleachers, staring up at the metal benches above their heads and occasionally looking over at one another as they talk.

Steve knows quite a lot, from where to put your hands to how to kiss and so much more. He talks about foreplay and mutual orgasms, and even though Jonathan is blushing through half of it he finds relief in being able to talk about it with someone.

Eventually though, they grow quiet, the questions answered but the time together stretching out into a long peaceful silence. Jonathan watches the older boy sit up, expecting him to leave, but instead he starts pulling up strands of grass and dropping it onto the younger's stomach as he gathers it.

"Have you ever thought about kissing a guy?" Steve says after a few minutes, and Jonathan sits up too, the grass rolling off of his shirt and into his lap. He dusts himself off quietly, debating his answer.

"Y-Yeah, have you?" He questions, and Steve shrugs as he picks a weed from the ground and twists it between his fingers.

"I mean I think every guy has thought about it at some point, even

if it's just for a second." He tells Jonathan quietly, and there's something about the way he says it that lets him know that Steve is included in this idea.

"I think about it a lot more than that." Jonathan confesses with a nervous chuckle, but Steve only nods quietly.

"Who?" He asks, and Jonathan's throat tightens a little.

"Um, well... A few guys over the years, usually before they do something to humiliate me." He scoffs weakly, Steve simply hums and then he's scooting a little closer.

"I don't think about it too often," He admits to the younger, who fidgets with the strings of his shoelaces. "Do you think-" The bell rings, both teens startle and Jonathan scrambles to his feet. He grabs his bag and slips it over his shoulder.

"Thanks for the talk, I really appreciate it." He says with a genuine smile, and Steve looks up at him with a smile that looks slightly troubled but Jonathan didn't want to think about why that was.

"Of course, any time. Any more questions, you know where to find me." He gets to his feet as Jonathan walks away, he can feel Steve's eyes on his back as he walks out from under the bleachers and towards the parking lot.

Steve leans against the metal underneath of the benches and sighs,

kicks at some of the grass he was plucking and then rubs a hand over his face.

"Get it together, Harrington." He mutters before picking up his bag and stepping out from under the bleachers, heading off towards his own car.

2. Mother Knows Best

Summary for the Chapter:

> Joyce just wants her son to be happy, Steve is what does that.

Notes for the Chapter:

> (Prompt: whenever Steve comes round to Jonathan's (he does it more often after the study session that was supposed to be with Nancy but she bailed last minute) Joyce makes comments once he leaves about how sweet he is and always praises him. "You know, he'd make a good boyfriend" "mom!" "I'm just saying, if you ever want to-" "mom please" "I think he likes you, I think you should go for it" - she's so happy and excited when Jonathan tells her they've got together.)

Jonathan follows Steve to the front door quietly, smiling automatically when the older boy turns back to look at him from the porch and grins brightly.

"See you tomorrow, Byers." He waves his hand and then trots off the porch and over to his car with grace and ease. Jonathan watches him pull out of the driveway, chuckles quietly when Steve waves at him from the driver's window excitedly once more. He offers a gentle wave of his own in response and then shuts the door, turning to find his mother standing in the middle of the living room.

"So... Steve, huh?" She's smirking, Jonathan doesn't like it.

"Yeah, we're friends." He nods his head, crossing his arms and feeling a little defensive.

"Just friends?" She inquires, still smiling, and Jonathan rolls his eyes.

"Mom!" He groans, storming past her as she hurries to defend herself.

"I'm just saying, he's a nice boy!" She calls after him, he shuts his bedroom door and dives onto his bed, burying his face into his pillow and smelling the faint scent of Steve's cologne from where he had been lounging lazily for the past few hours. They had spent the afternoon laying about and listening to music, talking quietly on occasion. Jonathan never knew he could ever tolerate Steve let alone enjoy hanging out with him. And yeah, he was kind of getting that stupid feeling in his chest that told him he was in trouble.

Why did his mom have to rub it in?

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"So, Steve," Joyce says over dinner one evening, Steve looks up while chewing a mouthful of spaghetti that Jonathan had fashioned himself. Jonathan had invited him over for the evening, he hated seeing Steve go home to an empty house and he could rarely stomach saying good night at the end of the evening nowadays. "Are you seeing anyone right now?" Steve chokes, Will snorts, Jonathan ducks his head as his cheeks light on fire.

"U-Uh," Steve croaks, taking a sip of his drink just to keep himself from going into a coughing fit. "No ma'am, not right now." He answers politely, Joyce nods her head easily.

"So you and Jonathan are just a couple of single men, that's nice." She smiles, Jonathan has the sudden urge to throw up, or scream. He looks to Will with wide eyes, the boy is smirking inconspicuously but he catches his older brother's desperate gaze.

"You know what happened today, mom?" Will interrupts suddenly, earning his mother's attention as he begins to talk about something that occurred during school. Jonathan sighs quietly in relief, looking to Steve and shooting him an apologetic look. Steve simply shrugs with a small awkward smile, goes back to eating.

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"You know, Steve is so good with Will." Joyce tells him one morning while he's serving breakfast, she had been racing around looking for her keys for the millionth time this week. Now, standing next to the table while Will sat down at his plate, she seemed calm and happy.

"He's okay," Jonathan offers with a shrug, already blushing. She was most likely referencing the night before, where Steve had offered to help Will piece together a science project the younger had been putting together on the kitchen table. Jonathan had watched them both fondly from the counter, as Steve joked with Will while simultaneously being a simple helpful hand. It had made his chest seem light and fluttery, and when Steve had looked over at him, he could only smile stupidly like some idiot.

"He's kind of lame but that's okay, he's funny enough to make up for it." Will says with a quiet giggle, taking a bite of a strip of bacon.

"Mom, I know what you're trying to do. Steve's straight, it doesn't work like that." Jonathan says as he suddenly finds the courage to speak up, meeting his mother's sad eyes as he straightens out his back and crosses his arms.

"I've seen the way he looks at you honey, maybe you should just give it a try." She suggests, Jonathan's already shaking his head and turning away. His hands are trembling as he turns off the stove, just the idea of admitting something so big to Steve made him on edge.

"I can't lose him," He mutters, and that's the end of that conversation. The kitchen is quiet as Joyce leaves out the front door, Jonathan sinks down in his seat across from Will and uses his fork to push his eggs around.

"He's not a very good friend if you can't tell him your secrets." Will murmurs after a few minutes of silence, Jonathan glances over at him. "He makes you happy, really happy. Mom doesn't want you to lose this," He explains, and then looks down at his plate. "He looks at you funny now, when you're not watching. Like the way Hopper looks at mom, you know?" He shrugs his shoulders.

Jonathan sighs, running a hand through his hair and feeling more conflicted than he's ever been.

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"Night, Jonny." Steve says, turning by the waist to look back at him.

He always looks back, perhaps a habit, or maybe something else. Jonathan catches something in his eyes, thinking back to the conversation he had with Will the week before. He reaches out before he can think twice, pulling the older boy back by his shirt and pressing their lips together.

He squeezes his eyes shut, the both of their bodies tense with surprise and anxiety. He feels Steve relax against him, and then a gentle hand is on his neck. Steve pulls back, eyes wide and mouth hanging open slightly. His thumb swipes gently over Jonathan's pulse, and then Steve smiles softly.

"Good night, Steve." He whispers, a small smile of his own forming. The older leans forward once more and presses one more quick kiss to his lips, runs his hand down his arm as he reluctantly pulls away.

"Seeya, Byers." He turns around and trots down the stairs with a hop in his step, Jonathan catches his bright smile when he crawls into the car. He can feel his heart beating fast, lips tingling with the memory of Steve's on them. The older teen pulls out of the driveway and Jonathan slips back inside, unable to keep the smile from his face.

"Hey mom?" He calls out, stepping through the living room and pausing in the hallway.

"Yes, sweetheart?" The woman says back from the kitchen, he can't see her but he knows she's just past the entryway, washing dishes from the sound of running water and the clink of plates and cups.

"Steve's gonna make a great boyfriend," He leans his head in the

doorway, and his mother turns around to give him a puzzled look. Jonathan smiles a little, and the woman's eyes widen as the realization hits her.

"Really?" She steps forward hurriedly and he pulls her into a hug. "Oh, sweetheart that's wonderful!" She whispers, and Jonathan swallows around the tightness of his throat as he hears her sniffle just a little.

"Yeah, yeah it is." He agrees breathlessly, almost unable to comprehend what just happened. "It's great."

3. The Trip Home

Summary for the Chapter:

> Steve Harrington gets stuck with local loser Jonathan Byers as a partner on a field trip, and then as a partner in crime on a mission to get home.

Notes for the Chapter:

> (Prompt: Jonathan and Steve don't like each other much but on a school trip to the big city they get accidentally left behind! cue a slow burn romance as they attempt to return to Hawkins via shenanigans (such as hitchhiking, stealing some kid's bike, using their charms to get a ride from cute college girls and old ladies and at one point trying to steal a car))

"All right everyone, find a buddy and stick with them." Steve turns his head and watches Tommy and Carol lock arms, rolling his eyes and opening his mouth to say something to Nancy before he realizes quickly that she's a few feet away talking with her friend Barb.

"Son of a bitch," He mutters, looking around nervously. Everyone had already paired off, even his casual friends had partners, he tucks his hands into his pockets and decides to go it alone this time.

"Harrington!" He jerks his head around to find Mr. Harris gesturing him over, he strolls over anxiously. "Have you got a partner?" He inquires, and Steve slowly shakes his head. "Good, you'll be with Byers." Steve turns his head to follow the man's eyes, observing the creepy little dude standing off to the side of the group of teens that had gathered in the gallery of the museum.

"Can't I just be by myself?" Steve asks, trying to keep the complaining

whine out of his voice.

"If I spot you without that young man by your side at any point during this trip, you'll be serving detention for the next two months." Harris insists with a low tone, mouth a thin line and eyes sharp.

"Yes sir," He sighs, turning on his heel and storming over to where the creepy little weirdo stands. "We're partners." He says upon stopping in front of Jonathan, the boy blinks at him and makes a couple of strange expressions before crossing his arms and ducking his head with a small nod.

Freak.

Steve glances over to where Tommy and Carol are standing, Tommy is grinning at him, obviously amused at the idea of Steve being paired up with the school freak. Carol whispers something to him and Tommy laughs, Steve scowls and turns away from them. He needed better friends.

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They walk through the boring museum, going from room to room and observing some of the weirdest sculptures and art exhibits Steve has ever seen. In his opinion, it's all a bunch of bullshit, what made this good art at all?

"It's about interpretation," Steve startles, looking over at Jonathan,

who hadn't strayed far from him but had kept his distance as well. It was the first thing he'd said in the past hour, Steve had been starting to think that the rumors of him being mute were true.

"You like this garbage?" Steve asks with a huff, and Jonathan shrugs his shoulders.

"Some of it, most of it's bullshit, you're right. It's all about the money, organized art is a monopoly." He explains to Steve quietly, his voice remains soft and gravelly, eyes focused on the piece in front of them. "I could put my shoe on a stand in here and people would say it's brilliant if they thought it was a real exhibit." He snorts softly, and Steve finds himself smiling just a little.

"Yeah, probably." He agrees with a shake of his head, watching as Jonathan turns and starts walking away. Steve trails behind him, wondering just how much Jonathan had to say but never had the gall or motivation to speak up.

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"God, I'm ready to go home." Steve runs a hand through his hair as he walks alongside Tommy and Carol.

"Where's the freak?" Tommy asks, and Steve frowns as he glances around. He hadn't seen the younger boy in about thirty minutes but heâ€™d figured he was just skulking around nearby like he always is. The kid was quiet and out of the way, it was easy to lose track of him.

"Shit, Harris is going to ream me if I lose him." He mutters.

"I'll stall for you, act like you're already on the bus and then get Kenny to act like he's gotta vomit when you and Byers get back." Tommy says with a chuckle, and Steve nods his head before patting his friend's shoulder and rushing back inside.

He hurries from one room to another, trying to recall where he last saw the younger boy. Steve might have thought he wasn't as weird or that much of a loser a few hours ago, but now all of that had been thrown out of the window. The teen throws open the men's restroom door and starts looking in stalls, throwing open one door and finding Jonathan slumped next to the wall.

"Dude, what the hell are you doing?" He demands, grimacing a little when he notices the young man's shoulders and head are damp.

"Hiding," Jonathan tells him quietly, and Steve rolls his eyes before reaching down and tugging at his arm.

"The bus is leaving, we have to go." He insists, and Jonathan gets to his feet before allowing the older boy to drag him away. "You smell like a urinal." He comments snappishly while they hurry through the halls towards the door.

"That's because your stupid friends shoved my head in a toilet." Steve pauses and glances back at Jonathan, the young man's eyes are red, skin pale and hair sticking to his forehead.

"Who?" He asks, feeling just a bit guilty. Jonathan was his partner, and he felt sort of responsible for taking his eyes off of him. Besides, it wasn't like he'd done anything to deserve his head dunked in a toilet, he'd been quiet and out of the way the whole time.

"You know who," Jonathan jerks his arm out of Steve's grip. "Tommy H, Kenny, Ryan J..." He lists with a scowl, Steve sighs and grabs him again, pulling him out the door.

"We have to go," He tells the other, and looks to where the bus had been parked when he walked back inside. Key words, had been. "Oh shit," He looks around, finding no sight of the bus. "Fuck, fuck, fuck." He steps out to the edge of the sidewalk and looking one way and another down the road.

"Why would they leave without us?" Jonathan asks, eyes wide and looking physically shaken.

"Tommy said he was gonna act like we were on board until we got back, h-he..." Steve looks back and forth once more as Jonathan's expression reveals dawning realization and disgust.

"Your friend screwed us over, he planned this." Jonathan says with conviction, Steve shakes his head in complete disbelief.

"He wouldn't do that, he might be kind of a dick but h-he wouldn't..." He mutters, glancing back to the street, as if the bus would magically appear.

"Get a grip, you and your friends are low life assholes." Jonathan snaps, running a hand through his hair and tugging on the still damp locks. Steve stares at him, feeling pissed off and hurt at the same time, how could Tommy leave them behind? "We have to get home, got anyone you can call?" He inquires, and Steve shakes his head dejectedly.

"No, my parents are out of town." He murmurs, slipping his hands into his jacket pockets with a sigh. "What about you?" He asks, frowning as Jonathan shakes his head.

"My mom can't take off work anymore, and my dad is probably somewhere in a ditch drunk off of his ass." He says, rather boldly in Steve's opinion. He seems almost unaffected by the words, if not a little frustrated with the situation itself.

"Okay, then I guess we've gotta start putting what we got to good use." He huffs with amusement, and Jonathan narrows his eyes as he observes Steve warily.

"And what's that?" He mutters.

"Our charming good looks, of course." He grins, turning on his heel and starting to walk.

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"Thank you so much, ma'am, we really do appreciate it." Steve says after they hop out of the car, the old woman waves at them with a delighted smile and her car pulls away from the curb. "Okay, only a couple dozen miles to go." He says as he turns to face Jonathan, who is currently staring at a group of girls across the street.

Steve observes them, watching as they buy a couple of drinks from the convenience store and walk out laughing and talking. The older teen grabs Jonathan by the arm and starts to pull him across the road.

"Nice going, Byers." He says under his breath, the younger makes a quiet disgruntled noise. "Hey ladies!" He calls out, watching the two girls turn their heads as they approach.

"Hi," One says warily, the other smiling just a little as she gives Steve a once over.

"I'm Steve, and this is my buddy Jonathan. He's kind of shy, but he wanted you both to know that he thinks you're absolutely gorgeous." He says with a smile, watching both of the girls' eyes swivel over to where Jonathan stands awkwardly beside him.

"Right..." One girl nods, looking uncomfortable. "Well we'll be going now." The girl takes her friend by the hand and starts to pull her away.

"W-Wait!" Jonathan calls out, earning alarmed looks from both girls. "I-I'm really sorry we bothered you, b-but we were on a school trip and this guy dunked my head in a toilet and my friend came to look

for me and we missed the bus." He admits honestly, and Steve watches as the girls' eyes soften slightly.

"They left you behind?" The one with brown hair asks, observing Jonathan with sympathetic eyes.

"Y-Yeah, and we don't have anyone to pick us up. So we were wondering if you might be able to give us a ride?" He finishes all in one breath, looking anxious and stressed, Steve has to give him props.

"Where do you live?" The red head asks, stepping forward and resting a gentle hand on Jonathan's arm.

"Hawkins, it's a small town outside of the city. But we just need to get to the edge of Indianapolis from here, even a few blocks closer will do." Steve speaks up, and the girls both nod. "South side of town, near route 56 is where we're heading."

"We're heading to the mall, it's maybe fifteen minutes from here. It's pretty close to Route 56." The brunette informs them with a small smile, and Steve looks to Jonathan with excitement, the younger looking just as relieved.

"Sounds great, we'd really appreciate it." Steve says with a smile, and they follow the girls back to their car. They get in the back seat of the little vehicle, their knees and shoulders brushing, they share a small smile. "Nice one, kid." He murmurs, and Jonathan shrugs with his cheeks turning a soft pink color.

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"Come on!" Steve throws a rock at the next car that passes them by, Jonathan sighs from his spot sitting on the side of the road.

It was starting to get late, they had walked for a while but they were still miles from Hawkins. Steve had suggested hitchhiking, but that was not turning out to be such a great plan. The sky was starting to turn orange, and the idea of being out in the middle of nowhere after dark didn't seem like the best plan.

"That's not helping," Jonathan says casually, propping himself back on his hands and tilting his head up to gaze at the sky.

"We're going to be stuck out here all night, with the coyotes and god knows what else!" Steve insists with his voice raised, he had been angrily ranting for the past five minutes now.

Jonathan snorts and reaches up to rub at his face with the back of his hand. He was sweaty, dirty, and not to mention exhausted. Honestly, at this point, he'd rather sleep on the side of the road than keep walking. A thought occurs to him suddenly, and he frowns down at his jeans as he picks at one of the many holes in the denim.

"I was supposed to watch my brother this afternoon," He mutters, barely looking up as Steve kicks a rock with a frustrated grunt.

"I had baseball practice, join the club." He grumbles, crossing his arms and dropping down into the dirt next to Jonathan. "This blows," He groans loudly, throwing himself onto his back and sprawling out.

"At least you aren't on your own, imagine doing this at thirteen." He chuckles bitterly, crossing his arms against the cool breeze and sighing.

"What do you mean?" Steve sits up next to him, their shoulders brushing like they had in the car earlier.

"Nothing," He shakes his head, regretting his words.

"No, tell me." Steve urges, and Jonathan shrugs his shoulders as he anxiously pulls his sleeves over his hands.

"Right after my parents got divorced, I was visiting my dad in the city. On the way home, I mouthed off to him and he kicked me out of the car." He admits quietly, closing his eyes when he sees Steve staring at him in shock in the corner of his eye. "I walked a few miles and eventually it started getting dark and I just sat down on the road and cried. A cop eventually picked me up, drove me home."

"What happened?" Steve asks hesitantly.

"My mom was still at work, Will was waiting for me when I got there. I made him promise not to tell, I was too scared of him to let my mom find out." He confesses, glancing over at Steve, whose eyes are

wide and stunned.

"That's bullshit," He mutters, and Jonathan smiles a little with a nod. "Parents are bullshit." He huffs, and they both look up when a car pulls up to the curb.

"Hey, you kids need a ride?" They both look up to find an older man in a pickup truck peering over at them.

"Yes sir, would you mind?" Steve says immediately, pulling himself and Jonathan to his feet.

"Where ya headed?" The man inquires.

"Hawkins," Steve informs him as they step closer.

"Get in back, I'll take you as far as Felton." He says with a nod of his head, Jonathan and Steve grin at each other before racing around to hop into the bed of the truck.

"Felton, that's like fifteen minutes away from Hawkins!" Steve pushes at Jonathan's shoulder excitedly, the younger scoffs a little and pushes him back with a small smile. "Almost there, Byers." He wraps his arm around Jonathan's shoulders as they pull away from the curb.

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"Are you crazy?!" Jonathan snaps as he watches Steve pull a random bike from where it's leant up against the wall of the gas station they were dropped of at.

"Get on, or I'll leave you here!" Steve insists, already climbing on and pushing off. Jonathan casts a glance inside, where the young man who owned the bike was still searching for something in one of the aisles of the gas station store.

"Fine!" He jumps on the back, and then they're taking off down the road as fast as they can. The road is dark, but the bike has a headlight that Steve quickly locates the switch to and turns on. It's gotten colder since the setting of the sun, Jonathan holds tight to the older boy and squeezes numb fingers on his shoulders.

"You know, this would make a great story for those stupid English assignments Mrs. Marsh gives us!" Steve says over the whipping wind rushing past them, Jonathan laughs and slips his arms down around the elder's waist when he turns sharply onto the next road.

"The Time I Committed Theft by Steve Harrington!" He snickers, Steve barks a laugh and the bike wobbles, he quickly rights them once more.

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"Here you go," They pull up to Jonathan's yard, Steve out of breath and sweaty from the long ride back.

"Thanks," Jonathan slips off of the bike, shifting awkwardly as he faces the older boy. "Today was k-kind of..." He rubs the back of his neck, Steve smiles with pink cheeks.

"Fun," He finishes for Jonathan, who nods his head. "Yeah, it kind of was, wasn't it?" He hums, fingers twitching on the handlebars of the bike. "I'm sorry Tommy swirlied you," He apologizes guiltily, Jonathan shakes his head.

"It's not the first time and it most certainly won't be the last," He sighs, running a hand through his hair.

"Not on my watch, Byers." Steve reaches out and shakes his shoulder, Jonathan's eyes widen in surprise. "I'll set him straight, and if he doesn't like it then maybe I'll just have to sit with you under the bleachers at lunch from now on." He says boldly, and the other boy's mouth drops open slightly. "If... If that's okay, of course." He smiles shyly, and Jonathan quickly nods.

"Y-Yeah, totally." He agrees with a small upturn of his lips, eyes sparkling as he sticks his hands into his pockets. "Do you... m-maybe want to come inside?" He asks hesitantly, and Steve glances past Jonathan at the run down but quaint little house before them.

"Maybe another night, when we aren't about to collapse from exhaustion." He snorts, and Jonathan nods his head.

"I could give you a ride home," He offers Steve with a jerk of his

thumb back towards the car in the driveway.

"Nah, but thanks anyway." Steve offers a careful glance up and down the empty street, before grabbing Jonathan by the arm and pulling him forward. He presses his lips to Jonathan's cheek, then shifts back and smiles as he turns the handlebars of the bike. "How about you give me a ride tomorrow so we can return the bike?" He suggests instead.

"Y-Yeah, totally." Jonathan breathes, cheeks bright red and mouth a shaky grin.

"It's a date, then." Steve says with finality, he kicks off and starts to pedal once more. He glances back, finding Jonathan still standing on the side of the road and watching him, he waves. "Seeya!" He calls, and after a returning wave he takes off full speed down the road.

He grins to himself as the wind whips past him, laughing giddily into the night as he turns a corner.

"What a great trip," He mutters under his breath, unable to keep the smile from his face.

4. In His Embrace

Summary for the Chapter:

> Steve has ignored his soulmate all of his life, until now.

Notes for the Chapter:

> (Someone on Tumblr named a-deliciouslyfadingcollection asked for a soulmate AU, any of my choice! I chose "You can feel when your soulmate is in distress and there's a tug that pulls you towards them when they are.")

Steve was used to ignoring his soulmate by the time he was seventeen, it sounded callous but they were always distressed. It scared him as a child, he wondered what could make them so upset, but eventually he grew accustomed to the feeling. He feels bad about it, because he used to try to follow the feeling when he was young but he could never get far. Whoever they were, they had short-lived bouts of anxiety or something of the sort. The times that it was really bad, it physically hurt Steve to ignore it, but he knew searching them out would just cause more trouble for him.

He learned to ignore the pull, the pit of swirling concern in his stomach that urged him to seek out his other half. He didn't know who they were, but they needed him, and yet he would continue on with his day. Sometimes, he thought that his soulmate was better off without him. Other times, he felt he was better off without his soulmate.

Then Jonathan Byers beat the ever-loving fuck out of him, and his pain was echoed by his soulmate for hours afterwards. His soulmate spent the night with a pit of worry in both their stomachs, probably worried about his wellbeing despite the fact that Steve had never

given one shit about them. He realized then that he was living a life that he couldn't continue living, it just wasn't right. He decides that night, in the waiting room feeling a quiet ache in his chest from his soulmate's worries, that he needs to change.

He wakes up some nights with his heart pounding and sweat dripping down his face, sometimes it's from his nightmares, others it must be from the nightmares or something else going on with his soulmate. He's pretty sure they're near, which isn't completely uncommon but it's lucky too. Some days he can feel the pull between them at school, so they might just be someone that goes to his school.

Steve finds his soulmate on a snowy January morning, and he never realized how blind he was until it all came together.

He gets to school feeling off, it's a feeling that permeates his soulmate's being, seeps into his own constantly. He ignores it as best he can, because the tug isn't there just yet. He meets with Nancy as usual, standing at his locker while she talks about yesterday's chemistry quiz. He can barely hear her, too distracted with the growing unease building in his stomach.

"Steve, you okay?" Nancy touches his arm and he has the urge to push her away, but he doesn't.

"S-Something's wrong," He glances around, looking for any evidence of something catastrophic going on. His insides are knotting up, the panic in his soulmate becoming so intense that it's starting to manifest in himself as well. Hands sweating, heart pounding, he's starting to think that his soulmate is dying.

"What do you mean?" Nancy questions, concerned.

"I have to go," He turns and starts walking, his body reacting instinctually on which way to go. He stalks down the hall, passing people left and right, turns down another hall and keeps going. There's a moment when he slows down, the pull in his chest switching directions slowly, he stops. He glances over to his left, where a boy's bathroom has a piece of paper stuck to it that has 'OUT OF ORDER' written on it in marker.

He pushes the door open carefully, finding it dark. The sound of retching has him stepping inside and locking the door behind him. Gasping sobs echo through the dark room, desperate and almost verging on hyperventilation. Steve walks slowly through the dark, reaching out and placing a hand on the bathroom stall door before him.

"You okay in there?" He says quietly, and the noises lessen significantly, muffle in a way. He pushes at the stall door, finding it locked. He sticks his foot out gently and finds that the stall has quite a large opening at the bottom.

"F-Fine," The voice trembles, the person short of breath. Their voice is a little raspy, choked, but he's almost positive it's a boy. He can feel the pressure between them, like their bodies were magnets and the only the separating them was this door.

He drops down slowly, only the sound of their breathing and the shift of fabric audible as Steve slips his way under the stall door. He can feel the presence of the other boy, the air between them like static, only amplified by the darkness between them. He scoots closer, reaching out and gently pressing his hand down on what seems to be

a heavily clothed shoulder.

"Are you sick?" He asks softly, listening to his soulmate breathe erratically, audibly trembling. Steve's presence would help, his comfort, he could help.

"N-No, I-I..." He sobs then, and Steve can't help himself anymore.

"C'mere," He reaches out with both hands, pulling the other into his lap and shifting his body sideways. He buries gentle fingers in longish locks, his other hand slipping into his soulmate's to squeeze it gently. "Shh, it's all right." He murmurs, there's a smell of acrid bile in the air, along with the usual scent of a men's bathroom, but he can't quite care at the moment.

"S-Steve?" His soulmate whispers, and his heart flutters slightly at the sound of his name.

"That's not very fair, you know my name but I don't know yours." He teases lightly, running a gentle hand over the young man's chest, adjusting his jacket and over shirt as he goes. The young man shifts slightly, his face still tucked against Steve's shoulder and his breaths still choppy as they come and go.

"Jonathan, Jon-Jonathan Byers." He murmurs, and Steve's heart stutters to a stop for a moment before picking back up. He remembers the pain of a fist in his face, the names he called the boy. He reaches up and runs a careful thumb over his cheek, sighing shakily. All those horrid things he'd done, not just to some kid, his soulmate.

"Oh," He says, unsure of what else to say. He feels almost panicked when Jonathan tries to slip away, gathers him up tighter and brings up his legs to pin him firmly between his thighs and his chest. "It's okay, I'm not mad." He presses his lips to the younger's head, able to smell sweat and a faint hint of shampoo, something fresh and generic. "I'm not mad." He repeats, holding him close and praying that Jonathan can say the same thing.

They fall quiet, just the sound of gentle breathing and Jonathan's occasional sniffle. Steve rocks side to side gently, slipping a cool hand under Jonathan's shirts to rest it on his stomach. The younger shivers in his embrace, startling a little when Steve adjusts him.

"Tell me what's wrong, what's got you so upset?" He inquires softly, feeling like they're in a solid bubble that can't be broken. The knowledge of his soulmate being safe, tucked in his embrace, makes him feel far more relaxed than he thinks he ever has been in his short miserable little life.

"It's stupid," Jonathan whispers, and Steve huffs quietly before slipping his slowly warming hand around the younger's side.

"Not to me, huh? Not to me, not when it's my soulmate." He promises, pulling him as close as possible.

"I ju-just overthink things sometimes," He breathes out shakily, hand still gripping tight to Steve's shirt. "My head just gets really l-loud and my heart beats fast, and all I can do is just f-find somewhere quiet." He buries his face in Steve's chest, sniffling quietly and clinging to the older boy.

"I'm sorry I never looked for you before, I was selfish..." He confesses, rubbing Jonathan's arm and pressing a kiss to his head. "Not anymore, okay? Does-Does this help?" He asks gently, earning a quiet nod of Jonathan's head against his chest. "Good, that's good. How about I take you home, to my house or yours... Get you somewhere quiet and comfortable, we can talk or whatever you want." He offers, and Jonathan grunts quietly in what seems to be agreement.

"Just a little longer, please?" Jonathan mumbles, and Steve nods silently, combing his fingers through Jonathan's hair and adjusting him in his lap once more.

"Course, yeah." He sighs, feeling content despite it all.

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Steve drives Jonathan back to the Byers' residence, which while rather small compared to his own house it is also extremely cozy. Nobody is home, so Jonathan leads him through the house and into the bedroom. In the light, he looks rather sickly and exhausted, his skin almost white and dark circles under his eyes like he hadn't slept in the last month.

"How's a nap sound?" He asks casually after watching him turn in a circle, looking unsure as to what exactly he's doing in the first place.

"Okay," Jonathan rubs his eye and kicks his shoes off clumsily, climbing on the bed and burying his face in his pillow. Steve can't

help but smile a little, stepping over to the window and drawing the curtains closed to block out some of the light. He walks around the mattress and sinks down, untying his shoes and then sliding his legs up onto the bed.

"Nice and comfy," He mumbles, a little bit to himself because he's pretty sure Jonathan is already asleep. Their soul bond is quiet, the residual anxiety that had been thrumming between them since they had left the school had started to dissipate.

He startles just a little when Jonathan sits up and moves closer to him, dropping his head on Steve's chest and half of his body on the older teen's. Steve hums, pulling the smaller closer and wrapping an arm around him as he adjusts his head.

"I thought you... you'd hate me." Jonathan says softly after a few quiet moments, his fingers twitching on Steve's chest.

"Funny, I thought the same thing about you." Steve says, peering up at the ceiling above them aimlessly. "I deserved everything you did and more, I was a dick." He admits, and Jonathan makes a quiet noise that doesn't sound like a disagreement. "But I'm hoping to make up for it, by being a good soulmate... I make an excellent pillow, don't you think?" He jokes, and Jonathan chuckles quietly.

"Thanks, Steve." He whispers, and Steve nods his head.

"Any time, Byers, any time." He rubs Jonathan's back, turning his head to smack a kiss right on the younger's forehead. He can feel the smaller growing loose with sleep, relaxing slowly until he's finally

unconscious. Steve sighs, continues to caress at Jonathan's upper back between his shoulder blades until he too feels sleepy and ready to drift off. He knows this is the start of a new life, one that he's glad to be a part of.

5. Scorching

Summary for the Chapter:

> Jonathan gets hurt during a mission, Steve makes a decision.

There's something severely wrong with the sound of Jonathan's raspy voice hollering in panic. Steve is immediately tense with panic and his eyes seeking out the younger teen in the chaos of it all. Nancy is still trying to secure the flaming beast they had set afire. Steve races around to find Jonathan trying to rip his plaid shirt off, the sleeve bright with hot flames.

"Fuck," Steve races up and helps him pull the rest of the plaid down, it overlaps the flames and Jonathan screams in pain as the rest of it is ripped off his arm.

The younger topples backwards, his now bare arm shakily held out and his eyes wide in horror. The skin is cracked and blistered from the heat, blood dripping slightly from the tears in the skin and the rest of the intact skin is bright red with more minor burns. The injuries run from the crook of his arm, all the way down to his wrist, and Steve's heart is beating wild with anxiety at the sight of it.

"Steve," Jonathan says faintly, and Steve turns his head at the sound of a gunshot, watching the beast fall to the ground and begin to disintegrate into ash immediately. Nancy's hair is falling from its ponytail in messy strands and sweat shines brightly on her forehead, but her jaw is still clenched in simple determination.

"Nance, we need the hospital." Steve calls across the field, and watching the young woman's eyes soften with worry. He turns and

crouches next to Jonathan, whose face is wrenched up in pain as he stares down at his arm and whose body is now trembling with either shock or agony. “Don’t look at it, okay?” He gently touches Jonathan’s chin, catching the younger’s eyes and observing the glassy and tear damp brown orbs.

“This is second degree at least, Jonathan can you stand?” Nancy says as soon as she approaches, and when Jonathan looks at her with a dazed expression, Steve realizes the answer is most likely no. “Okay, here…” Nancy takes Jonathan’s upper arm and applies gentle pressure to it so he holds it a little higher up.

“S-Should I…?” Steve is already slipping his arm around Jonathan’s back and up under his knees, earning a pained noise when Nancy gives him the go ahead and he lifts the younger. “It’s okay, I gotcha.” He assures as Jonathan’s good arm scrambles up and over his shoulders, clamping his fist down in the fabric of Steve’s shirt. There’s a stream of steady whimpers working their way out of Jonathan’s throat, his head buried tensely against the older boy’s chest.

They had to get back to the car and to a hospital quick, Jonathan’s lack of usual stoicism was starting to freak him out. He tries to keep his pace steady but still hurried, every more than slight jostle causing the young man in his arms to make a hurt noise. His breaths are making a terrifying hiss of a noise on every inhale which seems a lot like the noises he makes when it’s cold outside, and it doesn’t take an idiot to realize that Jonathan is probably already going into shock.

As soon as they reach the car, Nancy is right beside him again. She goes around to the other side of back seat and opens the door, sliding in and helping Steve maneuver him into the backseat without causing further injury.

“Lay him down,” She insists, and Steve can only nod his head as he attempts to comply. Nancy takes a careful hold of Jonathan’s upper arm once more, to keep it elevated as Steve settles him down on his back in the seat. “I’ll drive, get his legs in your lap and keep’em elevated.” Nancy instructs, and Steve nods once more, terrified into silence as he does as he’s told.

He watches as Nancy leans over Jonathan’s head, looking down at him intensely and still not letting go of his arm. She pulls off her jacket suddenly, and tucks it under his raised arm. Steve strips his jacket off in response, remembering one thing Nancy had done for him when he had broken his arm badly the year before. He gives the younger girl a hesitant look before settling his jacket over Jonathan’s chest, smoothing it down over him and squeezing the young man’s ankle.

“Just hold on, okay?” Nancy climbs into the front and then the car is rumbling to life.

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They don’t have to do skin grafts or any surgery, just some pain medication and a cleaning of the wound. Of course that sounds mild, but Jonathan had spent a good few minutes gritting his teeth and groaning in agony as they had washed the blistered and broken skin as gently as possible.

They had spent the night in the hospital with Jonathan, Steve charming a nurse with a sob story about how their hotel was miles away and they didn’t want to leave Jonathan. Steve posed as

Jonathan's step-brother, and Nancy as his girlfriend, so it all worked out in the end. Steve had fallen asleep with his head on the bed and his hand on Jonathan's good arm.

The doctor is extremely hesitant to release Jonathan after the second day, the young man still doped up on painkillers and his arm wrapped in gauze. Nancy puts on the charm this time, while Jonathan blearily murmurs something about calling his mom to Steve. His words weren't slurred, but they were elongated in a way that signaled that he was pretty high. Unfortunately, Steve couldn't enjoy it, not when Jonathan could have been really hurt that night.

They get Jonathan into the car, sitting up front, Steve buckling him in and giving him a soft kiss to his temple for his own sake. They start driving, Steve can't even look at Nancy for the first few hours let alone talk to her. This was her idea, she was the one that dragged them out of town, out of state. She had asked them for just a week, so Steve had taken off at the station and Jonathan had done something or other to get a favor from his manager at the hospital so he could get off.

"We can't keep doing this," He murmurs after a long time of driving, Nancy's head moves in his peripheral vision, he feels her lean against his seat.

"People need us, Steve." She whispers, the older boy shakes his head quietly. "We'll be more careful next time, I promise." She insists softly, Steve grips the steering wheel a little tighter.

"That's what we said when you got thrown into that tree, and when I broke my arm." He hisses under his breath, angry and although he'd never admit it, scared. "What happens next time? Second degree

burns, covering his arm, Nancy.” He snaps, a little louder this time.

“Mmph,” Jonathan stirs, shifting against the door and sitting up a little with a soft groan. “Motel?” He mumbles, wiping at his eye with his uninjured right arm.

“Not yet, Jonny, go back to sleep.” He says quietly, trying to make his voice a little calmer. The young man looks over at them from his seat with bleary eyes, he had been sleeping off his pain medication for the past few hours.

“Shouting,” He hums, leaning back against the window.

“We were not shouting.” Steve corrects him, glaring out at the road.

“Liar, liar, pants on fire.” Jonathan snickers, forcing a small smile onto Steve’s face. Jonathan shifts once more in his seat and sighs unhappily. “Arm hurts.” He complains softly, Steve pulls over onto the side of the road.

“How long’s it been?” He looks down at his watch and Nancy makes a quiet thoughtful noise.

“Noon,” She offers, and Steve nods his head as he reaches over to push the younger man’s bangs from his eyes.

“All right, well it’s a little after eight. Jonny, how about we find the

nearest food joint and get some grub into you and we'll give you a few painkillers then?" He asks unnecessarily, Jonathan needed to eat with food and giving him his pain meds would just knock him out again for another eight hours so a meal was necessary anyway.

"M'kay," Jonathan reaches up and scratches his cheek with his good hand, then starts to lean back up against the car door again. Steve takes a minute to observe him, pale in the dim light, with smudges under his eyes and his hair a greasy mess from being in a hospital overnight and having spent the entire day before tromping through the woods. He sighs through his nose and glances back at Nancy before putting the car into drive again.

This wouldn't happen again.

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"You could have cleaned him tomorrow when he's less drugged out," Nancy offers from the counter as Steve hauls Jonathan from the bathroom in his arms and settling him in one of the two beds. He couldn't wait though, Jonathan smelled like smoke and dirt and Steve couldn't stand it. He had kept Jonathan standing in the shower, his gauze covered arm wrapped in plastic. It hadn't been so hard to wash him, but cleaning his hair was a damn battle considering Jonathan was partially out of it and would occasionally jerk away from him in irritation. Most of it was spent trying to pry Jonathan's head from his neck, the young man leaning heavily against him and trying his best to fall asleep standing up.

"Here you go," Steve whispers, pulling the plastic off of the young man's arm and pulling the motel sheets over him. Jonathan smiles at him sleepily, reaching up to rub at his eye before his hand drops

unceremoniously beside him on the pillow.

His hair is still damp, Steve doesn't want him to catch a chill so he lifts the young man's head and settles a towel beneath it. He spends a few minutes sitting at the edge of the bed, alternating between combing the boy's hair with his fingers and caressing his cheek as he dozes off into a medicated sleep.

"I'm done, Nancy." He says hoarsely, Nancy sighs as if his words mean nothing. "I mean it, Nance, Jonathan is not going to die doing this. I don't care how many people die because we don't help, it's not our problem anymore." He shakes his head, standing up and moving around the bed.

"He'll be fine, Steve." Nancy assures, and Steve shakes his head once more, more firmly this time.

"No, he'll have scars, he already has scars, we all do." Steve lifts up his shirt to reveal one of the few marks on him, the one on his abdomen where he'd had a claw snag him and practically rip him open. He only really remembered Jonathan crying that night, clinging to him so tight even though all Steve felt was cold. "I won't lose him, I will not spend the rest of my life visiting a grave and regretting everything." He snaps, climbing into the bed next to Jonathan.

"Fine, I guess I'm on my own then." Nancy says, retreating to her own bed, taking off her watch.

"You are." Steve scoots closer to Jonathan, resting his head on the

younger man's shoulder and wrapping a gentle arm around his waist. Jonathan twitches lightly in his sleep, but continues on blissfully unaware, and Steve wouldn't have it any other way. Nancy shuts off the light, Steve closes his eyes and listens to his boyfriend's deep respirations under his ear, the careful rise and fall of Jonathan's chest.

He wouldn't lose this, not even for Nancy.

6. What About You?

Summary for the Chapter:

> Steve and Jonathan's lives aren't that great right now, but maybe they could at least help each other through it.

After graduation, Steve finds himself living a bit of a dull life. He never pictured anything amazing for himself, he was no Nancy Wheeler in academics, but he figured he might have a few years of college or something. But he found himself quickly falling out his father's good graces, he was lucky to be working at a warehouse and paying for his apartment.

He didn't see Nancy all that much anymore, she was too busy planning for college. But he did keep in contact with Dustin, and through him, he heard a few things. The kids told him things, let slip all the little things and some of the more private stuff that might be harder to get out of anyone else. Jonathan and Nancy barely lasted three months before it all fell to pieces, Nancy wanted a guy that could spend time with her and devote a lot of his life to her. Jonathan just didn't have time for her, it seemed, like she figured he would.

She wanted someone to follow her to college, to have a nice little life together with 2.5 kids. She wanted a docile little guy to just go with the flow, and to be honest, that sounded a little bit like both Jonathan and Steve at one point. But after a while, things get in the way, whether it be loss of love or attraction, or plain old realizing that life isn't damn near as simple as they imagined it to be. She needed a man that fit her fantasy, not a guy who was practically already a father or a guy who didn't give one absolute shit that he wasn't important or special.

Jonathan wasn't that type of guy, he'd been an adult since before Steve had learned to work the laundry machine. He had been working two jobs, taking care of his little brother, and spending whatever free time he had left to keep up with his school work. According to Mike, Will had said Jonathan was barely scraping by in school because of all of his other obligations. He'd gone from a straight A student to barely maintaining C's in just a few years, his priorities were with his family and not his own future.

He hadn't even tried to apply to NYU, his dream school. He had gotten weird after the Mind Flayer incident, worse than the usual Jonathan weird. Will was concerned his brother was on drugs, and Joyce was probably holding similar concerns. It wasn't exactly a surprise, the trauma they'd all experienced, it was a surprise they all hadn't turned to more harmful coping mechanisms.

Steve was more of a chain smoker than ever, his hands shook if he wasn't smoking every hour. He locked his doors at least twice a night, and had a habit of sleeping with his nail bat right beside his bed. But his party days were over, he was just some grunt working at a warehouse in the city. Pulling all the shifts he can and debating as to whether or not taking college courses would work out.

He's dwelling on all of these thoughts as he heads home for the night, which was an apartment building just a few minutes away from his childhood home. There's a pit in his stomach, he's been feeling lonely since his parents kicked him to the curb, hell, since Nancy dumped him. He felt alone, like all of the bullshit he'd been through didn't matter, not when he really didn't have anyone anymore. He decides to go on a little drive around the town, just to think. It's past two in the morning, but he knows if he goes home he'll just be caught in his thoughts and staring at the ceiling.

The streets are bare, quiet, dark, it's perfect to drive around and just breathe. It pulls him from his rut, his detachment from reality. He turns up his radio, smirks at the sound of Fleetwood Mac and mouths the lyrics tiredly as he drives.

"If I could… baby I'd give you my world…" He hums, bobbing his head along with the beat. "How can I, when you won't take it from me?" He taps his fingers along the steering wheel, humming along with the chorus as he turns the corner, frowning at the sight of a figure walking along the road.

He almost passes them up, but then he recognizes the long mop of shaggy hair, the patched-up corduroy jacket and tattered blue jeans. There's a glimmer of something in his hand, Steve pulls up beside the familiar figure. He can see a pair of orange headphones over his ears, but Jonathan stops walking so he must have noticed the car.

"Jonathan," The young man's head tilts up from staring at the ground, glassy eyes squint up further as they focus on Steve's face, he pushes down his headphones. "What the hell are you doing, man?" He asks, Jonathan turns and looks behind him, as if searching for evidence of anyone else around.

"Walking," He offers quietly, his voice is hoarse, tired. He shuffles a bit closer to the car, Steve can hear music playing from the headphones as he adjusts his Walkman into his other hand.

"It's thirty degrees," Steve says as argument, Jonathan glances one way then the other, shrugging. "Get in the car, Jonathan." He insists, Jonathan quickly shakes his head. "I'll take you home," He promises.

“I’m not going home,” He mutters, Steve frowns and looks up ahead, trying to piece out where he might be headed.

“Where are you going?” He questions, Jonathan scowls and turns away from the car, starting to walk again. Steve drives forward along with him slowly, leaning one arm out of the window. “C’mon, dude, I’m sure your mom is worried about where you are.” He knows he’s going for the guilt trip, but to be honest, he didn’t want Jonathan out here on his own. He might be able to throw a mean punch, but who’s to say there isn’t creatures stalking around hungry for flesh.

“She’s spending the night at the Chief’s place with Will,” Jonathan tells him, clipping his Walkman onto his jeans and shoving his hands into his jacket pockets. “I can’t stay there alone,” He shakes his head, stepping back from the car. “Go home, Steve.” He reaches up for his headphones, Steve sighs and wipes at his face.

He should just go, go home and get some rest, but Jonathan looks beat. His eyes are bloodshot and watery, the usual circles under his eyes are darker, and he looks skinnier than he had the last time Steve had seen him. Will might be right about the drug thing, he really did look like he’d been through the ringer.

“We could have a sleepover,” He proposes, earning a face from Jonathan that makes him rethink his words. “Sorry, my only friends are eighth graders. You could stay the night at my place.” He offers instead, Jonathan shakes his head with a snort.

“If you’re trying to do this to get on Nancy’s good side, forget it. We don’t talk anymore.” He snaps, Steve watches the young man reach up and wipe at his eyes.

“Dusty told me,” He says, Jonathan scuffs the toe of his dirty sneakers on the street pavement. “I think we’ve been through enough together to be friendly to each other,” He pats the outer side of the door of his car. “Hop in, man.” He insists once more, watching as Jonathan sighs heavily before slowly making his way around to get into the passenger seat.

They drive for a few minutes, Steve makes a couple of circles and heads aimlessly through the streets. He turns the radio up just a bit when Electric Light Orchestra comes on, one of his favorites. Jonathan sits silently next to him, but when Steve glances over at the young man as the song plays, he seems to be mouthing some of the lyrics.

Doo wop, doobie doo do wop… Doo-wa-doo-lang… Blue days, black nights… Doo-wa-doo-lang!

“A stuck-up music snob like you, likes ELO?” He demands jokingly, Jonathan scoffs quietly and turns hard eyes onto him.

“What do you want, Steve?” He asks, sounding tired and sad, Steve frowns.

“A friend, maybe?” He mutters, almost vulnerably, Jonathan turns his eyes to his lap and starts to rub his hands together anxiously. “Your best friend is your thirteen-year-old brother… My best friend is a thirteen-year-old that is kind of like my brother.” He says softly, slowing to a stop at a stop sign. “All the casual friends I had left town for college, and none of them know what it’s like to have interdimensional monsters try to eat them.” Jonathan chuckles at

that, and some of the tension is gone for a fraction of a second.

“I haven’t slept in three days,” The younger admits, bringing up a hand to wipe under his nose before he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a pill bottle. “I’ve been living on coffee and caffeine pills since I had to watch my brother get exorcised.” He mumbles, Steve reaches over cautiously and rests a hand on the teen’s shoulder, squeezing gently.

“I have a gallon of Neapolitan ice cream in my freezer, two spoons, and a couple of shitty movies with our names on it.” He offers, Jonathan nods and allows Steve to take the caffeine pills from him.

“Thanks,” He murmurs, Steve pulls his foot off the break and turns the direction of his apartment.

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Jonathan eats most of the chocolate portion of ice cream, while Steve eats most of the strawberry, they take turns washing their palate with vanilla. It’s a pretty good deal, reclined on the couch and gorging themselves on frozen treats while watching a movie or two. After a while, Steve starts to get tired, and Jonathan has set his spoon to the side and curled up against the arm of the couch.

They watch another thirty minutes of a movie before Steve fades out and falls asleep, unable to hold his eyes open anymore. He only wakes up when he’s shifted, something underneath him moving. He pries open a tired eye and finds the screen of the TV to be blue, the tape having reached its end. He sits up and wipes drool from his

mouth and blinks sleepily.

Steve quickly realizes he'd fallen over and cuddled up to Jonathan in his sleep, the young man laying on his back now with his head under a pillow that had been on the floor earlier. He must have woken up, hopefully before Steve had made a fool of himself. He's surprised when he leans a little closer and Jonathan's eyes open.

"Jesus Christ," He startles just a little, leaning back as Jonathan sits up.

"You've only been out for like two hours," He murmurs, doesn't seem like he's been sleeping in the slightest.

"Sorry," He says quietly, noting the small drool stain on Jonathan's stomach.

"It's okay, Will sneaks into my room at night sometimes. I'm used to waking up covered in spit." He scratches at his cheek, which is a little stubbly.

"You couldn't sleep?" Steve questions, Jonathan shrugs and crosses his arms, resting them on his thighs.

"I can go, so you can go to bed." He offers, Steve quickly shakes his head.

“Nah, you never know what might be outside. I won’t sleep if you leave now,” He stands up and stretches, walking over to his door and making sure the lock is fastened.

“I can take care of myself,” Jonathan says defiantly, but not heatedly, he sounds too resigned to be truly angry.

“You can defend yourself against me, but that’s not saying much. Let’s be real, Mike could kick my ass if he was angry enough.” He waves his hand, earning a small snicker from the younger teen.

“I guess,” He stands up and rotates his head on his neck, raising his arms above his head and showcasing a sliver of his stomach. Steve can see his hipbones a little more than he should, stomach sunken in slightly.

“I’ll take you home tomorrow, we’ll get breakfast together.” He suggests, Jonathan pushes his hair back and sighs.

“Okay,” He relents, sitting back down on the couch.

“That couch is a piece of shit, you can have the bed if you’d like.” He says with a point to the doorway, Jonathan shakes his head.

“N-No, it’s fine.” He assures, pulling his feet up onto the cushions. “Night,” He lays back against the pillow he’d had, crossing his arms and closing his eyes. Steve stares at him a moment, before heading out of the room and stopping at the closet in the hall. He fetches an

extra quilt, walking back and shuffling over to the couch.

“Here,” He throws the quilt over Jonathan, who he knows is definitely not asleep. “No sneaking out, because I don’t want my door left unlocked and you’ll hurt my feelings if you skip out on our breakfast date.” He jokes, Jonathan’s eyes open as Steve straightens out.

“Thanks, Steve.” He mumbles, Steve nods his head and smiles, ruffling the younger’s hair for a fraction of a second.

“Try and get some sleep, Jonny.” He urges softly, heading back to his room to sleep.

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Steve’s never woken up so startled without having a nightmare until the sound of screaming echoes through his apartment. He practically falls out of his bed, trying to figure out what’s going on as he blearily grabs his nail bat, then he remembers that Jonathan was supposed to be sleeping in his living room.

He sprints into the room, dropping his bat to the floor when he realizes that Jonathan is alone. The young man is curled up on the couch, panting heavily with tears staining the dark rings under his eyes. Steve steps closer, crouching down in front of him.

“I-I’m sorry,” Jonathan shakes his head, wiping at his face with a

trembling hand. “I fell asleep, I’m sorry.” He whispers, eyebrows scrunched together in distress.

“It’s okay,” He reaches out and gently wraps his hand around Jonathan’s, squeezing gently. “I get’em too, all right?” Jonathan shakes his head, sniffling, Steve shuffles closer. “Hey, it’s all right. I’ll get you some water.” He goes to stand up, Jonathan’s fingers turning into a vice grip when he attempts to release his hand.

“No, please…” His voice cracks, new tears mingle with the old drying streams. Steve drops down onto the couch instead, wrapping his arm carefully around Jonathan’s shoulders.

“Listen, I’m not gonna sleep on this couch anymore, not with another person on it. You might be short but you aren’t exactly little either,” He teases weakly, Jonathan sniffs and wipes at his face again, nodding. “Come to my bed, I’ll lock my door and my bat will be right by the bed.” He assures, Jonathan immediately shakes his head once more.

“N-No, I can’t sleep.” He insists, Steve sighs and pulls back, lacing his arm through Jonathan’s and pulling him carefully to his feet.

“We can keep each other safe,” He promises, tugging him towards the room. “If you hear something, you can wake me up, and if I hear something I’ll wake you up.” He suggests, stepping through his room door and over to the bed.

“I don’t want to wake you up again,” He mumbles weakly, Steve snorts and pushes him onto the bed.

“You take the side against the wall, but if you have cold feet, keep them off of me.” He warns jokingly, Jonathan gives him a hesitant look and then scoots over to the far side of the bed. Steve fetches his bat, then returns and closes the door, locking it.

He checks his window, had picked this apartment because it was up high and only had one window. He kept the blinds closed and the curtains pulled tight, the lock always fastened.

“You don’t have to do that,” Jonathan says, sounding embarrassed.

“It’s not for you,” Steve says, which makes the younger fall quiet again. He settles the bat by his bedside table, then gets into the bed next to Jonathan. It’s a queen, not very big, but big enough for two almost grown men to sleep together in decent comfort.

He slowly reclines himself down onto his back, the room isn’t dark because he keeps a little light next to his closet, a nightlight, but nobody really knew about that but him. He couldn’t sleep in the dark anymore, not when he knew what could be hiding in it. He sighs quietly, starting to settle down again after such a scare.

“Steve?” Jonathan murmurs, Steve hums tiredly. “Thanks.”

“Any time, Jonny.” He shuts his eyes and tries to relax, feeling just a little safer with another body in bed with him.